

**An Archaeological Survey of the Regal Hills
Development, Bexar County, Texas**

by

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Submitted to

**Frost Geosciences
Boerne, Texas**

**Report No. 26
Abasolo Archaeological Consultants
San Antonio, Texas
2006**

Abstract

Abasolo Archaeological Consultants conducted an archeological survey of the 30 acres in the Regal Hills Development for Frost Geosciences and the City of San Antonio on January 4, 2006. The assessment was carried out in accordance with the "Archeological Survey Standards for Texas" in order to assess the significance of the site regarding consideration for nomination to National Register of Historic Places. The assessment consisted of a 100% surface inspection of the property. A stone fence probably dating to the 19th century, and a historic trash dump, probably dating to the mid 20th century were the only features found. A very thin scatter of chipped stone artifacts (flakes, a biface fragment, and a uniface) was recorded near the eastern end of the area. These artifacts may have been related to the nearby and destroyed site 41BX11.

Introduction and Background

Abasolo Archaeological Consultants has conducted an archeological survey of the 30 acres in the Regal Hills Development in northern Bexar County, Texas. The project was done on behalf of Frost Geosciences and based on recommendations of the City of San Antonio Historic Preservation Office. The fieldwork was carried out on January 4, 2006. The property is located in northern Bexar County, south of FM1604 and east of IH 10. Vance Jackson Boulevard borders the property on the west and a railroad marks the eastern boundary (Fig. 1). The survey was carried out in accordance with the "Archeological Survey Standards for Texas" (Texas Historical Commission) in order to assess the significance of any cultural resources that might be eligible for nomination to National Register of Historic Places. Though the project area is covered in heavy brush, an effort was made to walk over 100% of the 30-acre tract. A stacked-stone fence as probably dating to the 19th century, and a historic trash dump, probably dating to the mid 20th century were the only features found. A very thin scatter of chipped stone artifacts (flakes, a biface fragment, and a uniface) was recorded near the northern end of the area. These artifacts may have been related to nearby 41BX11, small burned rock midden which had been destroyed by the time it was recorded in 1969.

The survey was carried out by the authors, Steve Frost, and Marc Haga. The surface visibility varied from good to poor, depending on the dense brush and the nature of the ground cover. For example, some juniper ash trees in the thick brush had been cut down and left in piles. Surface exposure was certainly adequate to determine if significant archaeological features or sites were present.

The surface in the northern and western sections of the property consisted mostly of exposed limestone with dense juniper and scrub oak cover. Crawford-Bexar stony soils (0-5% slope) occur throughout the property (Taylor et al. 1991). The stony soils are very thin and precluded the possibility for any buried archaeological deposits.

Archaeological Background

Chronological Overview

The Regal Hills tract lies within an area of northern Bexar County where a series of major prehistoric sites have been excavated and published. These sites span most of the 13,000-year chronology of the region's human presence. Two kilometers to the northwest, just south of FM 1604 is the Pavo Real site (41BX52; Collins et al. 2003). This site yielded abundant chipped stone remains linked to the Paleoindian period. Occupation of that site began around 13,000 years ago during the end of the Pleistocene (Ice Age), continuing intermittently for the next 1000-2000 years. The Paleoindian period ended in a time of improving climate, around 8800 years ago. A good example of the later Paleoindian cultures has been found about 2 km to the west of Regal Hills, at site 41BX47 on the east side of Leon Creek (Tennis 1996). This site also provides an excellent example of Archaic occupations. Lasting about 7000 years, the Archaic

peoples were hunters and gatherers who exploited the resources of a essentially modern Central Texas environment. Plant resources, such as the bulbs of stool and other plants, were often processed in burned rock middens, earth ovens of the sort also seen at 41BX47. Another of the major resources was chert (flint) that weathered out of limestone of the Edwards formation in northern Bexar County. Archaic sites are marked by large numbers of projectile points (used on spears thrown with the *atlatl* or spear-thrower; Tennis 1996) and other tools, along with much flake debris resulting from their manufacture. Around 1300 years ago, changes began to appear in the long Archaic life way. Most recognizable is the introduction of the bow and arrow, with the tiny points notably distinct from the larger spear points of Archaic times. This era, lasting until the arrival of the Spanish in the 17th century, is known as the Late Prehistoric/ On the higher, western side, is site 41BX631, recorded by the junior author in 1984 (notes on file with the junior author). Although the materials at that site are predominately Archaic, there are a number of Late Prehistoric arrow points (especially Scallorn) and there are several artifacts (a gunflint and a Guerrero point [Turner and Hester 1993]) represent Historic Indian occupations in the area dating to the 18th century.

The Historic archaeological record in the area is best represented by a series of ranch and farm structures documented at Camp Bullis, north of the Regal Hills tract. These include several houses built in the mid- to late-19th century, some constructed by early German immigrants (Gerstle et al., 1978).

Sites Near Regal Hills Tract

There is little in the way of recorded archaeological or historical resources in the vicinity of the survey area. Site 41BX11, recorded by Bill Fawcett in 1969, is on the eastern perimeter of the Regal Hills tract. It was a small, thin burned rock concentration or midden, and had been largely destroyed before Fawcett's visit. He did collect a Late Archaic Frio point and some other chipped stone artifacts at the site. As we noted earlier, this site may be related to the scattered stone artifacts documented during the Regal Hills survey. About 1 km south of 41BX11 is 41BX367, a 19th century lime kiln, recorded in 1977 by W. R. and Shirley Van der Veer.

The City of San Antonio Historic Preservation Office has, in its files, some data on the Bacon ranch, to the north of the survey area. There is a stone house in ruins and a cemetery (Beckmann-Bacon Cemetery) with graves from the 19th and 20th centuries. The earliest grave is of Edmund Bacon (died 1878) who bought the property in this area in 1868.

Survey Findings

Only a trace of prehistoric material was observed in the eastern section near the railroad that borders the property on the east side. These items probably relate to a scatter around 41BX11 once located a short distance to the south. The only artifacts were the proximal end of a small thinned biface, probably the preform for a Late Archaic dart point, and a uniface tool. There was no evidence of burned rock or of any concentrated lithic scatters.

The property is currently used for illegal dumping, and evidence of dumping may date back to the mid 20th century. An old dump, probably dating to the 1930s-1940s based on the bottles and rusty tin cans (mostly oil cans), was encountered near the northeast corner (Fig. 2). This feature is not historically significant.

The only significant feature noted on the property was a rock fence composed of stacked, often massive, limestone cobbles and boulders (Figs 3-5). The stones were not shaped prior to stacking. Some of the stones are quite large, 2 -3 feet long and a foot or more in thickness. In some areas, much large stones were apparently set as the “foundation” of some sections of the fence. This fence began at the property line near the southwest corner and extended east-northeast for a distance of about 330 feet; from that point the fence angles northward for about 1,040 feet to the end. The northern section was more poorly preserved than the southeastern section where cobbles were stacked as high as approximately 4 feet or 1.2 meters (Fig. 3). The 1938 aerial photo (Fig. 4) provided by Frost GeoSciences clearly shows the fence and its extension beyond the current project area (Fig. 4).

Such stone fences were once common across the Texas Hill Country prior to the introduction of wire fencing. Recent studies by Laura Lynne Knott (2004a,b; 2005) suggest that rock fences, sometimes called “German fences,” were built primarily by settlers who had come into Texas from the South (Tennessee, Kentucky, northern Alabama, northern Georgia), bringing a fencing technology that was primarily of British origin. It is likely that almost all rock fences were built in the mid-19th century, with the practice ending upon the introduction of barbed wire after the Civil War. Perhaps it was built by Edmund Bacon after his purchase of the property in 1868, although earlier owners might have undertaken the construction.

Interestingly, evidence of a very old barbed wire fence was seen where the rock fence ends on the north (Fig. 5). No sign of a barbed wire fence was seen south of this point. Barbed wire was embedded about two inches into the trunk of a dead oak tree. A sample of the wire was taken in an effort to determine style of barbed wire. The wire section (Fig. 7) appears to be a common type of two strands of round wire with four twists for about every 4 ¾ inches between barbs; barb length of 3/16th of an inch. Based on a comparative collection available to Abasolo Archaeological Consultants, the wire appears to be “Glidden Barb,” first made in 1874.

Numerous patents were obtained in the latter half of the 19th century on various styles of barbed wire. Joseph Glidden was credited with the first barbed wire patent on November 24, 1874. According to McCallum and Owens (1996:377-378), a demonstration on the effectiveness of barbed wire for fencing in longhorn cattle was made by John Warne Gates in the Military Plaza in San Antonio in 1878). These dates are important in that any barbed wire used as fencing in Bexar County would have to date some time after 1878. The stone fence, however, would undoubtedly date earlier – prior to the widespread use of barbed wire.

Summary and Recommendations

An intensive pedestrian survey of the Regal Hills Development yielded a trace of prehistoric material on the east side of the property. Two historic features were observed, a dump probably dating to the mid 20th century, and a rock fence that dates to the middle or late 19th century. This rock fence may also be associated with an old barbed wire fence. The rock fence was mapped and photographed and will be given a formal site number. No further investigations are deemed necessary for the rock fence. However, preservation of a segment of the largely-intact southeast portion (near Vance Jackson) is encouraged, perhaps incorporated into future landscaping plans.

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Figures

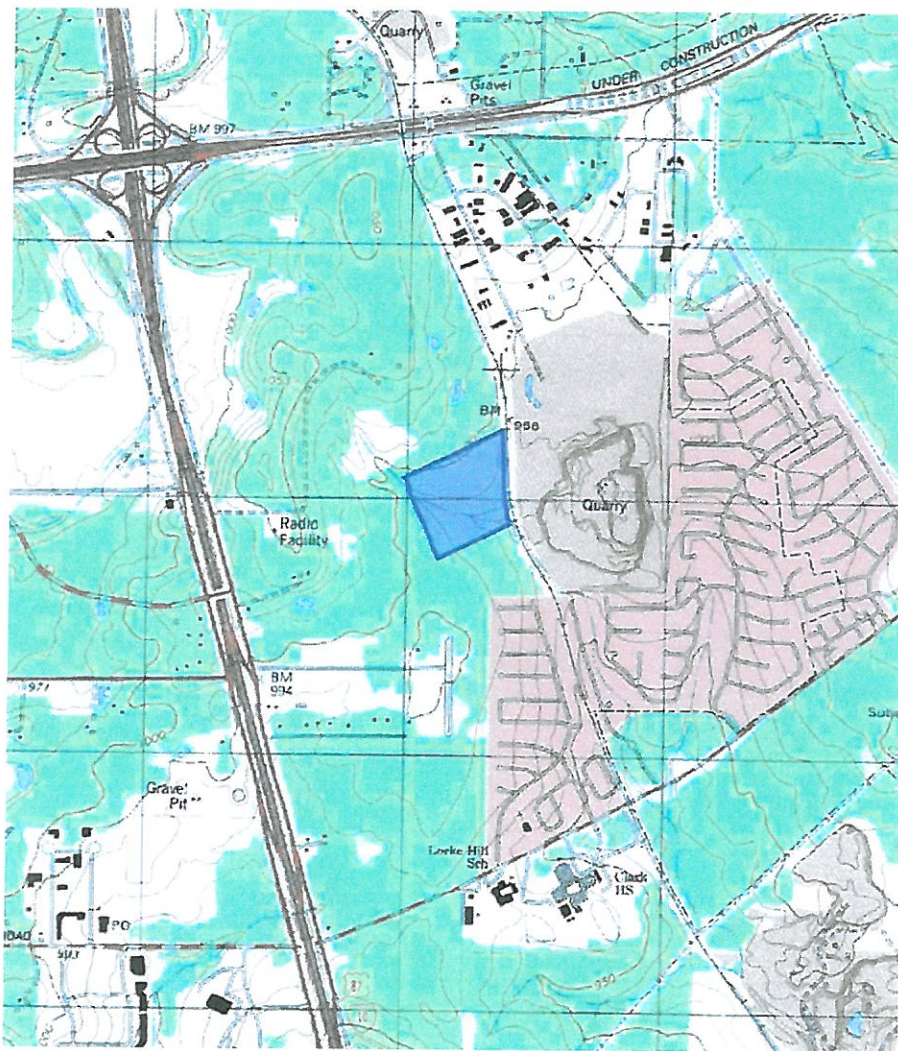


Figure 1. Topographic map of area showing the location of the Regal Hills Development (image courtesy of Frost GeoSciences)



Figure 2. Mid 20th century dump located near the northeast corner of the tract.



Figure 3. Western section of the stone fence feature.



Figure 4. 1938 aerial view showing the boundaries of the Regal Hills development and the ext of the stone fence. Note that the fence line extends westward beyond the present day boundary (image provided by Frost GeoSciences).



Figure 5. Aerial showing the property location and current extent of rock fence.



Figure 6. Dead oak tree with barbed wire embedded in the trunk.

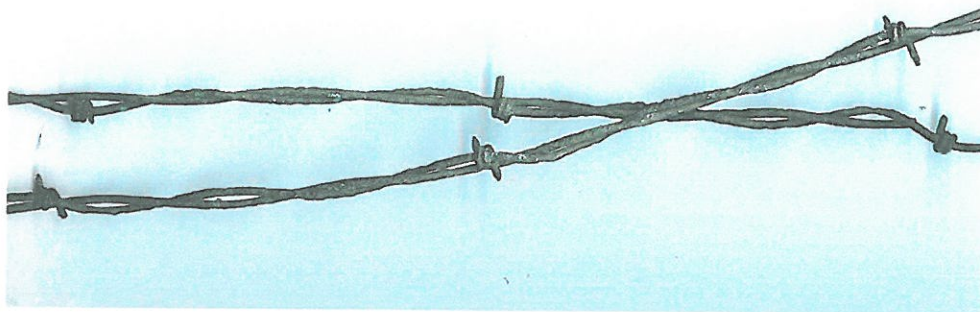


Figure 7. Barbed wire sample embedded in dead oak tree.